BUYING A NEW SEWING MACHINE

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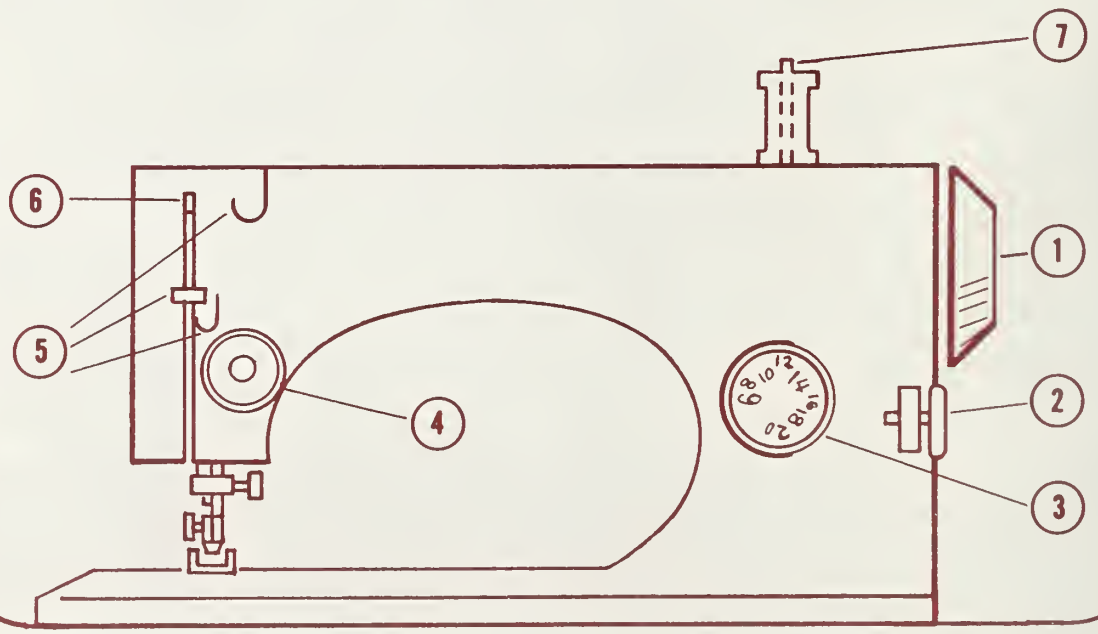


BUYING A NEW SEWING MACHINE

By Virginia Ogilvy, Clothing Specialist

Buying a sewing machine for home use is a long-time investment. Reputable manufacturers build machines to last for many years with only minor replacement of parts. Usually you can clean, oil, and adjust the machine yourself.

Today there are many choices of machines in a wide range of prices. No one machine is likely to have all the features you might desire. This booklet can help you select the machine best suited to your present and future sewing needs.

Fig. 2
Straight stitch.

Fig. 3
Basic zigzag stitch.

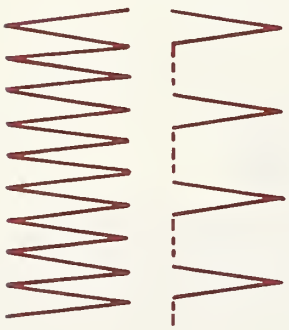
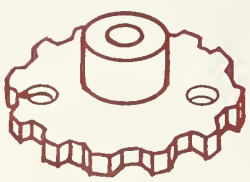


Fig. 4
More versatile zigzag stitches.

Fig. 5
Cam.



CHOOSING A MACHINE

There are four main categories of sewing machines from which to choose:

- straight stitch
- basic zigzag
- more versatile zigzag
- most versatile zigzag

What kind of sewing will you be doing? Most home sewing needs can be filled by the most simple and least expensive machine—one that does only straight stitching, forward and reverse. This is called a *straight stitch machine.* (Fig. 2) With this machine, attachments are provided or can be bought to make a zigzag stitch, buttonholes, ruffles, overcasting or blind hemming. However, if you have to buy too many extra attachments for your simple sewing machine, the cost may be more than a machine with a few more built-in stitches.

A more versatile and somewhat more expensive machine is a *basic zigzag stitch type.* (Fig. 3) This sews a straight stitch, but can also be set to sew a zigzag stitch with the needle swinging from side to side. The basic zigzag stitch is used for overcasting, blind stitching, darning, satin stitch, buttonholing, and sewing on buttons.

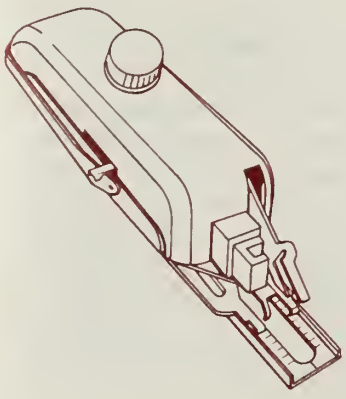
A greater variety of decorative stitches is possible with a zigzag machine. It takes some skill to develop a uniform pattern or design.

Some *more versatile zigzag* machines offer special stitch possibilities. (Fig. 4) In addition to the operations of the simple zigzag machine, this kind of machine has from 1 to 25 or more stitch possibilities. The needle movements are guided by cams, which may be built in or added separately. (Fig. 5) Extra cams may be available to make more stitch

Fig. 6
Most versatile zigzag stitches.

Fig. 7
Buttonhole stitch.

Fig. 8
Buttonhole attachment.



types possible. Some of the special stitches you can make on this machine are blind hem, buttonhole, multiple zigzag, and a variety of decorative stitches. Although considered automatic, you need a complete knowledge of this machine to make the best use of its varied operations. Be sure to get personal instruction from the seller.

When buying a zigzag machine, test it for good straight stitch and for ease in switching from straight to zigzag stitching.

There is a fourth type of zigzag machine, which might be called a *most versatile zigzag*. (Fig. 6) In most zigzag machines, the needle motion is side-to-side while the fabric moves under the presser foot, but this machine has a mechanism for moving the fabric automatically back and forth while the needle swings from side to side. This makes possible a new range of practical stitches, including some of the special stitches recommended for sewing stretch fabric. Some of these machines can be updated with cams as new features are developed.

Weigh carefully your decision as to whether you use special stitches often enough to warrant the added initial cost and the increased amount of service that will probably be necessary. It is logical that a more complicated machine will take more skill to adjust. You may not have this skill. Straight stitch machines are simpler to use than zigzag machines, easier to take care of, and less likely to need adjustment. Why buy a machine with capabilities you'll never want to use?

Attachments

Some attachments come with your machine. Most straight stitch sewing machines can be fitted with additional attachments, such as one for buttonholes and one for zigzag stitch. These attachments shift the cloth when making the buttonhole or a stitch. Only a limited number of buttonhole sizes can be made. These are the most commonly used, however, and with a little practice you can make a good buttonhole on them. (Fig. 7) This buttonhole attachment can also be used on many zigzag machines. (Fig. 8) Some prefer the buttonhole made with this attachment, since it makes a buttonhole with rounded ends similar to one made by hand.

Fig. 15
Try out at least three kinds of machines.

Fig. 9
Open arm model.

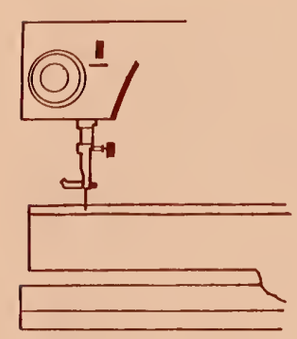


Fig. 10
Sewing bed extension.

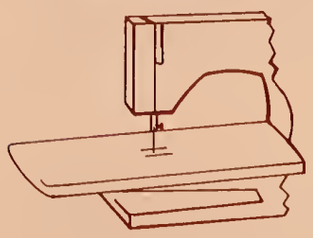


Fig. 11
Speed control operated by arm.

An Open Arm Machine

Some makes of machines come in an *open arm* model. (Fig. 9) This style allows you to slip tubular parts of a garment, such as a sleeve, pant leg, cuff, etc., over the arm in order to sew them more easily. A *sewing bed extension,* which can be attached, is usually provided to enlarge the sewing surface. (Fig. 10)

A Sewing Machine for Disabled Persons

Machines have been developed for use by handicapped persons who have impaired vision and for those with limited use of hands, arms, or legs.

For a person with restricted use of the hands, the speed control is designed to be operated by the foot, the arm, or the knee. (Fig. 11) Knobs are fiitted with projecting spokes. (Fig. 12) Levers have knobs at the end; clamp screws hold the needle in place.

A slow speed control makes operation by a disabled person easier. A special tong makes removal and fitting of bobbin and bobbin case easier. A guide bar for guiding fabric under the needle is attached to the bed of the machine.

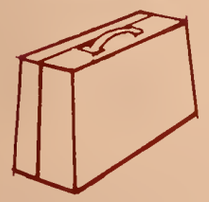
Cabinet or Portable Machine

A further choice is between a cabinet or a portable model. A cabinet should have well-supported leaves and sturdy legs. This gives good sewing support with a flat surface at the same height as the surface of the sewing machine. It has the added advantage of always being ready to use. A machine in a permanent cabinet or table is more convenient and time saving for anyone who sews frequently. Choose the cabinet for sturdiness, and convenience, since its main purpose is to house the machine. The extra cost of a fancy cabinet may better be invested in useful furniture. You will have several choices of style and price of cabinet to house the machine you select. (Fig. 13)

Fig. 12
Knob fitted with projecting spokes is easier to operate by a disabled person.

Fig. 13
Cabinet styles.

Fig. 14
Portable style.



The portable is the usual choice where space is limited, as in small homes and apartments, or where a machine must often be moved from place to place. (Fig. 14) Some portables are merely the regular sewing head set into a carrying case. Though this is heavy and unwieldy to carry, it does have the advantage of being able to fit into a cabinet if you want one at a future time. Some portables are of lightweight construction with an attached carrying case which opens on hinges to provide a working surface. If the machine is too compact in size, the space between the bed and the arm of the machine might limit the bulk of the material which can be handled.

TEST THE MACHINE YOURSELF

You should investigate *at least three* makes of machines in order to have a basis for comparison. Look them over carefully and use them yourself. If it is not possible to see and operate every machine being considered, study a catalog description and compare it with ones you have seen. Discuss the features of the sewing machine with dealers, repairmen, and friends whose opinion you value. This will give you some basis for deciding on the machine that will best fill your particular needs.

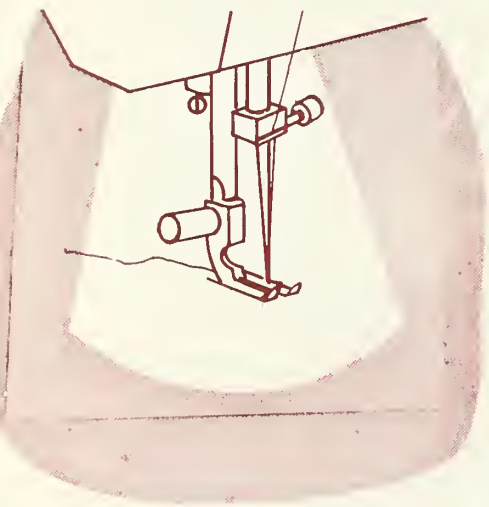
You will want to choose a machine at which you can sit comfortably when operating the controls—one which is easy to handle and operate, and is not too noisy. Select one that is readily adjusted to your varying sewing needs and is easy to care for and keep in perfect running condition.

The person who will *use* the machine should be the one to *select* it, even if it's intended as a gift!

A well-written instruction book with many illustrations should accompany every sewing machine. It should clearly explain how to operate, adjust, and care for the machine. You are entitled to free personal instruction on operating your new machine. The more versatile your machine, the more important it is to have this instruction.

Fig. 16
Bobbins wound evenly and unevenly.

Fig. 17
Light should focus on stitching.



HOW DOES IT OPERATE?

1. Is the machine quiet, free from objectionable noise and vibration at all speeds?

2. Does it change readily from one speed to another? Does it start easily? Will it operate slowly?

3. Try the machine on some of your fabrics, stitching both straight and curved seams.

   - Do the individual stitches form a straight line?
   - Does the fabric have a tendency to drift to right or left?
   - Is the fabric easy to guide when stitching curved seams?
   - Do unlike fabrics feed under the needle at the same rate? (Sew together two pieces of fabric of different weights such as lining and a heavy outer fabric.)
   - Stitch together two pieces of like fabric of the same length. Do they feed under the needle at the same rate?
   - Try sewing with a variety of the fabrics you'll be apt to work with—thick and thin, loosely woven and tightly woven, leather or leather-like fabric, knits, a combination of fabrics.

4. Can the presser foot be easily adjusted to adapt to various weights of fabrics?

5. Is the knee or foot control comfortable to use?

6. When the bobbin is being wound, does it fill evenly? (Fig. 16)

Lighting

- Does the lamp throw light on the stitching where it is needed? (Fig. 17)
- Is the lamp in a position where it will not burn you when you raise the presser foot or when threading?

Fig. 18
The stitch length control scale should be easy to read.

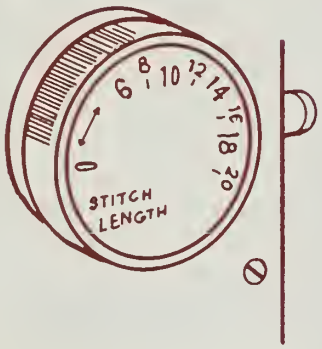
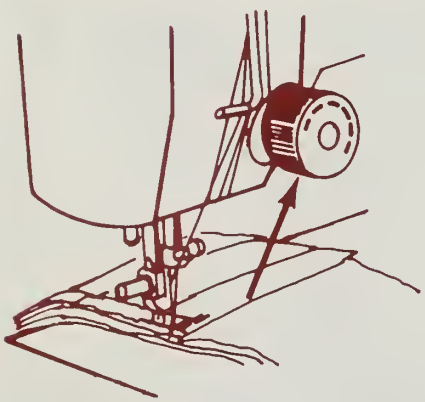


Fig. 19
Tension gauge should be easy to adjust.



The sewing machine light helps when threading and using the machine. It does not provide enough illumination for regular sewing and should be supplemented by a good local light, such as a floor lamp. The sewing machine lamp, its position, and the type of paint finish on the machine sometimes combine to reflect sufficient light to produce an objectionable glare. A frosted lamp bulb, diffusing cover for the lamp, or a choice of paint finish can reduce this glare.

Is finish glossy or flat? Machines finished with a smooth, glossy surface are easiest to keep clean, but light reflections may prove annoying. Some manufacturers recognize the effect of color in causing eyestrain, and finish their machines in green, brown, or tan. Others use a crackle surface to prevent glare, but this may reflect many points of light just as disturbing as the glare from a glossy finish.

Threading

- Is the machine easy to thread?
- Is the bobbin easy to take out and put back?
- Is the bobbin easy to thread?

Stitching

- Is the stitch length control scale easy to read? (Fig. 18)
- Is the upper tension adjustment shown by numbers that are easy to read?
- Will the machine stitch backwards?
- Are there adjustable lock positions for the forward and reverse stitching control?
- Are the tension adjustments clearly explained in the instruction book? Are the upper and lower tensions easy to adjust? (Fig. 19)
- Is there a quick feed dog and presser bar release mechanism for darning and embroidery? If there is no feed dog release, is there a plate to cover the feed dog?
- Can pressure of presser foot be easily adjusted?

Fig. 20
Foot pedal control.

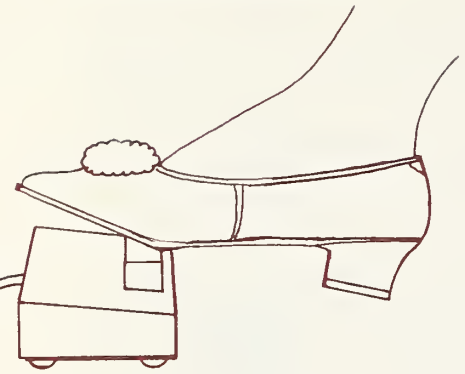


Fig. 21
Speed governor on foot control.

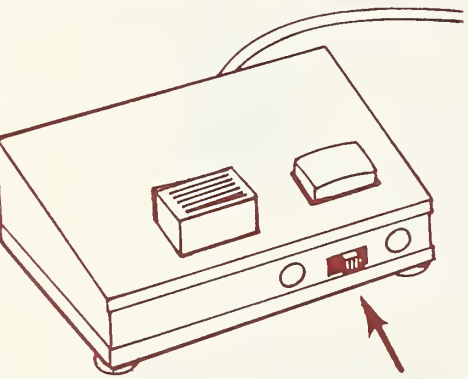
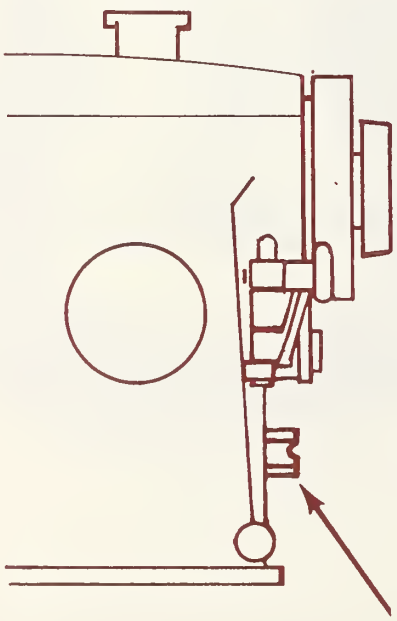


Fig. 22
Speed governor on machine head.



Controlling Speed

The speed of the sewing machine motor is controlled by a foot pedal (Fig. 20) or a knee lever. This control mechanism may be either a *step control* or a *carbon control.*

The *step control* changes the speed in a series of steps or intervals, usually from 5 to 8, from slow speed or top speed. With some step controls, the first step does not provide the slow speed you sometimes want in sewing. The *carbon control,* however, adjusts the speed from slow to fast smoothly and uniformly, especially when starting, and at very slow speed. On either type of control the power is reduced at low speeds.

Sometimes you need to sew slowly so that you can place stitches carefully. This is a great advantage for one who is learning to sew. On machines that have this governing feature you will find a button, dial, knob or such on the head or foot control of the machine. (Figs. 21, 22) This is in addition to the speed control you operate with your foot or knee.

There are three ways of doing this, available on machines today.

1. Controlling speed by withholding electrical current. This will reduce the power of the machine as well as the speed.
2. Control of speed by a transmission with a gear reduction system, which provides slower speed with increased power. This is similar to the gear system in an automobile. Full or greater power and slow speed are sometimes needed at the same time.
3. Solid state electronic control system which maintains full power at various speeds.

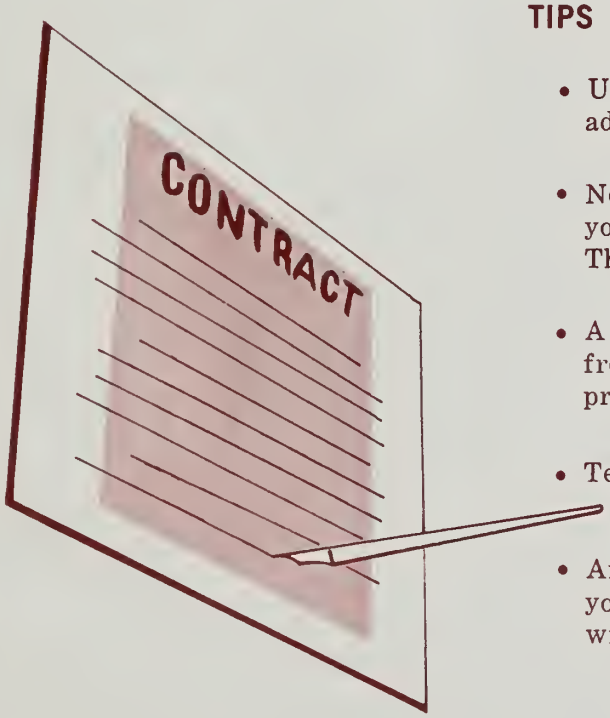
Will It Be Easy to Care for?

1. Are the cover plates easily removed and all parts readily accessible for cleaning, oiling, and lubricating?
2. Is the light bulb easy to replace?
3. Is the machine easy to dust and wipe clean?

SERVICE AGREEMENTS AND GUARANTEES

Know your dealer. Can he give good reliable service? Most dealers who sell sewing machines offer some form of guarantee and free service agreement. The best guarantee is one from the manufacturer. Dealers move. You may move. Buy a machine from a company with service centers in many places. Would you have to pay the cost of shipping the machine to the factory for service? How far away is the factory?

The guarantee protects the buyer for varying periods of time after purchase against the possibility of inferior or defective parts or concealed damage. Make sure that this guarantee protects you for a reasonable length of time. The free service period places the responsibility on the seller to correct any defect in adjustment or parts, other than normal wear, at no charge to the buyer. These agreements SHOULD BE IN WRITING. Verbal agreements are unsatisfactory because they may be impossible to prove or because the exact sense of such agreements depends upon memory.



TIPS ON BUYING

- Understand the total cost. Understand all costs in addition to the retail price.
- Nothing is free. Do not be misled by proposals that you are paying only for a cabinet or service charge. The machine is included in the price.
- A machine should last for a number of years. Buying from a well established manufacturer will more likely provide a continuing source of parts.
- Test the machine yourself before you buy it.
- After you have made your purchase, take time to study your instruction book and learn the proper use, otherwise you might damage the machine.

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